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## **Review of Matthew Heinz, *Entering Transmasculinity: The Inevitability of Discourse* (Bristol: Intellect, 2016)**

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In *Entering Transmasculinity: The Inevitability of Discourse*, Matthew Heinz discusses the discourses surrounding transmasculinity, centring on four main areas: 'The Transmasculine Patient', 'Norming Abnormality', 'Finding One's (Male) Self', and 'A Man's Man'<sup>1</sup>. These theories of identity and the ways in which healthcare access is important to transmasculine identity formation are themes that run throughout the text. Heinz discusses the impossibility of his analysis removing itself from his trans subjectivity and in a similar vein I acknowledge that this review cannot be disentangled from my trans subjectivity. In the Preface, Heinz constructs his reader and their act of reading or purchasing this text as one which constructs oneself as interested in transmasculinity, which Heinz acknowledges is potentially 'scholarly, personal or scholarly and personal' (p. xiv). This implies a predominantly transmasculine and academic audience, and encourages us to think about the ways in which this reading increases the visibility of transmasculinity and further adds to the discourse of transmasculinity under discussion. This influenced my own reading of the text; I was much more aware of my visibility as a transmasculine person reading it in a coffeeshop than reading it in bed, but there is also a political opportunity within this visibility.

On Trans Day of Visibility, I read this in the hairdressers, a space in which my transmasculinity is not always read as such, and shared a photo of this on social

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Heinz, *Entering Transmasculinity: The Inevitability of Discourse* (Bristol: Intellect, 2016), Contents page. Further references to this book are given after quotations in the text.

media encouraging conversations amongst trans friends about the desired or undesired visibility in everyday spaces, particularly amongst those of us that are often misgendered. This highlights the way in which my reading of this book contributes to the discourse on transmasculinity under discussion—a discourse the book itself both contributes to and analyses.

Heinz introduces the transmasculine patient and examines the multiple conflicting narratives that emerge when engaging with transmasculine healthcare and surrounding discourses. Heinz considers and critiques the construction of the 'ideal' transmasculine patient and the associated narratives that are offered by some transmasculine individuals and medical service gatekeepers as required for access and diagnosis. Heinz is careful to distinguish between the medicalisation and the pathologisation of transmasculine representations but acknowledges that 'pathologization and medicalization are frequently used as synonyms' (p. 31). Heinz considers Muhr and Sullivan's analysis that to be trans is 'often coded as a pathology'<sup>2</sup> but also offers many examples of trans individuals' agency in accessing healthcare on their terms. However, Heinz notes that transmasculine healthcare is not simply reducible to ideals of the obedient patient or the patient activist due to transmasculine discourse 'stretching itself' (p. 71) to include greater variations of gender identity, gender expressions and sexuality. This is also significant when considering the healthcare offered to trans children and young people. It is worth noting here that Heinz's focus is on transmasculine adults which does leave out an emerging discourse on the trans child.

This idea of transmasculine discourse 'stretching itself' (p. 71) reveals the ever-expanding environment which this text emerges from and Heinz acknowledges the competing narratives that result from such a stretched environment. Heinz's use of medical discourse alongside patient narratives presents a unique offering in which to consider trans healthcare not typically seen in academic texts. Placing patient experience alongside discourse produced by medical institutions is an important strategy utilised by patient activists to reframe debates and it allows Heinz to undertake a similar shift within trans scholarship.

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<sup>2</sup> Sara Louise Muhr and Katie Rose Sullivan, "'None So Queer as Folk': Gendered Expectations and Transgressive Bodies in Leadership', *Leadership*, 9.3 (2013), 416-435 (p. 420).

Heinz offers further examples of the stretching of transmasculine discourse when he addresses the tropes of difference, othering and abnormality prevalent in these debates as they acknowledge that ‘monsters and freaks’ (p. 94) are still found in transmasculine representations, even if they are ‘not representative of a mainstream discourse’ (p. 94). Heinz also discusses the celebrated difference amongst some transmasculine individuals including those who adopt the ‘unicorn’ of uniqueness; the ‘wolf’ which can be a lone wolf, a period of change or simply a reference to increased body hair; and the ‘warrior’ or ‘outlaw’ of rebellion (pp. 95-97). Heinz introduces a concept of transnormativity that co-exists alongside those narratives of difference. Transnormativity is linked to white, middle-class narratives, just as heteronormativity is, and Heinz notes that it fails to acknowledge the variety of transmasculine expressions that intersect across multiple identities and experiences. This transmasculinity is also linked to a structural journey that requires childhood trans experience, wrong body narratives, distress, treatment and resolution (pp. 104-106). While transnormativity is not a new concept in trans scholarship, Heinz allows for a multiplicity of conflicting voices to emerge in these areas such as the example above relating to celebrated difference and transnormativity. Heinz seems keen to present a diversity of trans voices without necessarily favouring any of those presented.

Heinz goes on to offer a fuller analysis of this expected—often medicalised—‘journey’ of childhood trans experience, wrong body narratives, distress, treatment and resolution in Chapter Three. This is in addition to many other narratives of journeys offered within transmasculine discourses. Heinz notes the ‘imperialist consequences’ in these narratives that privilege symbolic notions of journeys, migration and transition and fail to recognise those ‘permanently dislocated from home’, citing Bhanji’s work critiquing these narratives from a diasporic perspective (p. 128).<sup>3</sup> Such fraught notions of home and destinations of transmasculine journeys are relevant to the final chapter, which discusses the complexities of passing. Postcolonial scholarship is particularly important for Heinz’s analysis here and the inclusion of postcolonial work which does not necessarily overtly concern itself with

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<sup>3</sup> Nael Bhanji, ‘TRANS/SCRIPTIONS: Homing Desires, (Trans)Sexual Citizenship and Racialized Bodies’, in *Transgender Migrations: The Bodies, Borders, and Politics of Transition*, ed. by T. T. Cotton (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 157-175 (p. 170).

trans subjects provides an interesting analytical framework that is not always present in trans academic texts.

Heinz moves from this postcolonial inspired critique to engage with forms of privilege, such as white privilege, male privilege and passing privilege. He engages with the concept of specific trans male privilege as well as associated or expected gender roles. He also considers standards of beauty and visual representations of trans men or the idea of the ideal transmasculine look. Heinz presents a particularly distinct notion of '(trans)male privilege', which addresses the nuances between 'male privilege and cis privilege', as well as the ways in which race and sexuality intersect with such privilege (p. 198, 201). Many of the discourses within this 'A Man's Man' section dispute the accessibility of these privileges, especially male and cis privilege and the extent to which they may be available to trans men. This exemplifies the ways in which this book as a whole attempts to entertain potentially conflicting transmasculine discourses in the same space to foster greater understanding. Heinz summarises this project much more vividly in the conclusion:

The emergence of a meta-discourse about transmasculinity, one that allows for the simultaneous existence of biological realities and social constructions, holds the promise, however fragile, of allowing that same sense of ambiguity, that same acceptance of two seemingly irreconcilable sets of knowledge, to flourish in understandings of sex and gender at large. (p. 230)

The majority of the texts under consideration within the book are online texts that are not necessarily fixed in content or availability at any given moment in time. This temporal understanding of transmasculinity that is alterable reflects Heinz's understanding of transmasculinity presented in the book but Heinz does not explicitly consider the temporariness of his source material. It is also worth noting that engaging with understandings of transmasculinity in online spaces is a large project to undertake—one where there will be continual additions as the transmasculine content online continues to develop. Also, the current transmasculine narratives Heinz reflects on are subject to change, and retain many contradictions and contestations which forms a significant part of Heinz's analysis.

Heinz refuses the notion of a singular transmasculine narrative and instead offers insight into the variety of discourses that construct and deny such a singular offering. The inevitability of transmasculine discourse is an inevitability of

proliferation, contestation, difference and intersectionality that constructs a notion of transmasculinity that can retain its singularity only on the surface. Heinz offers a variety of discourses from YouTube videos to healthcare specialists' websites, and most of them remain within an online space—a space that can be edited, deleted, and shared much like the ever changing transmasculine discourse it forms. Although much of the referenced text is from an online platform, the online texts themselves are most often produced by transmasculine individuals discussing their own lives and constructing their own narratives of understanding their relationships to transmasculinity. The majority of these narrative sources are public blogs, websites and YouTube videos maintained by transmasculine individuals. Almost all of the material cited is publicly available although there are brief references to online groups and forums that are not. For instance, Heinz makes reference to the 'Yahoo FTM Surgery Info group' and states that this 'is age-restricted and requires a membership application and review for access'—a practice that is not uncommon (p. 56). Heinz fails to offer a reflection on the need for public and private spaces within online transmasculine discussions and communities or that any one of the public blogs, websites or YouTube channels maintained by transmasculine individuals could become private or restrict access in the future. This does unfortunately mean there is a missed opportunity to reflect upon the shifting public and private spaces within online communities, which is made more complex by individuals linking to their offline identities, and the desire for gatekeeping and restricting access to self-defining individuals within some spaces which could have been an interesting addition to Heinz's work.

Earlier in this review I noted that Heinz's desired reader has a scholarly interest, a personal one, or both, and at the end of this review I offer the information that upon finishing this book I lent it to a friend with less of a scholarly interest and more of a personal one. The fact that after reading the book my desire was to share it is a reflection on the accessibility of the book that Heinz has produced. I am not entirely sure whether I will get my copy back, but I hope it will be shared and passed around much like many of the online texts under Heinz's consideration. I would recommend this text to those seeking an accessible introduction to transmasculine discourse or those seeking to develop their understanding outside of a typically academic approach to transmasculinity.



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